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MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS, BOSTON

CLASSICAL ART

FIFTH CENTURY ROOM

BRONZES AND TERRA COTTA FIGURINES

XI

CLASSICAL ART

Fifth Century Room:
Bronzes and Terra cotta
Figurines

Department of Classical Art
Gallery Guide no. 11

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Classical Art .

Fifth Century Room.

Bronzes.

Case 1.

Top shelf, left to right.

Two oinochoes (wine pitchers) with trefoil mouth. Fifth century B. C.

The indestructible quality of terra-cotta has effected the preservation of innumerable clay vases, but bronze gradually disintegrates, and thin walled vases of this material are especially susceptible to decay. The greater cost of bronze also tended to restrict the number of vessels made from this metal, since they were objects of luxury purchased chiefly by the rich. For these reasons they are rare at the present day. Repousse, line engraving and modelling in high relief have been combined in the decoration of these two pitchers. The taller has a remarkably elegant outline. At the base of the handle is a Siren, with wings delicately rendered in a form of Oriental origin; the figure retains all its original sharpness of surface. At the juncture of the handle with the lip of the vase is the bust of a girl wearing the Doric dress. The figure is modelled in the severe style of the first half of the fifth century B. C., the period to which this, as well as the other pitcher, belongs. On the medallion at the base of the handle of the smaller pitcher is a finely chiselled relief of a running or flying Nike (Victory) of the later archaic type.

Top shelf, centre.

Mirror and standard. Fifth century B. C.

Until the fourth century B. C. the polished metal discs used by the Greeks as mirrors were supported on standards, which were often in the form of a statuette. Such small bronzes show a development parallel to that of sculpture, and the traces of archaism apparent in this graceful figure of Aphrodite indicate that it dates from the end of the transitional period of Greek art about the middle of the fifth century B. C. The simple arrangement of the hair and of the Doric dress gives it a pleasing severity which is in sharp contrast to the elaborate daintiness of the Aphrodite in the Archaic Room (Case 4), although the attitude and action of both figures are so

much the same. The goddess stands on a round, fluted base, in form not unlike the inverted calyx of a flower, which rests on three lions' paws; with her left hand she lifts a fold of her robe, and in her extended right hand holds out a dove. Two winged Erotes (Cupids) hover round her head. On the edge of the disc at either side a fox chases a hare; one of the hares has been lost. There was once a ring in the projection at the top for suspending the mirror.

Top shelf, west side, left to right.

Statuette. Scribe with a tablet, standing. Fifth century B. C.

Statuette. Girl with a dove, standing. Fifth century B. C.

She wears a Doric dress and over it a heavy mantle.

Statuette. Youth stooping.

Marks of contact visible on the shoulders of this stooping youth indicate that a second figure was originally seated on his back, probably engaged in the act of throwing a ball, in a game mentioned by ancient writers and illustrated on vases, The general style of the figure, the shape of the head and the manner of rendering hair and eyes date it as contemporary with the sculptured pediments of the temple of Zeus at Olympia (about 457 B. C.), An impression of great freedom and naturalness is produced by variation of details in the two sides of this apparently symmetrical figure; and the true and lively rendering of bodily forms in an unusual posture bears witness to the accurate observation and technical skill of the artist. The base on which the figure stands is modern.

Second shelf, west side, left to right.

Statuette. Early fifth century B. C.

A nude youth seated on the ground, asleep, with his head resting on his right knee. The piece was attached to some object, perhaps as the handle to a lid.

The statuette of a girl in Doric dress, bearing a tray laden with cakes and fruit, may have been dedicated at a shrine to represent the donor and her offering. Its quiet dignity and charm are heightened by the slight archaic restraint which it shares in common with transitional sculpture toward the middle of the fifth century B. C. The statuette was originally

gilded.

Four bronze statuettes of the fifth century B. C., are especially interesting for the action represented by each. Two show a youth with right arm raised in the attitude of taking an oath; the third is a youth putting a weight and the fourth, another athlete in the act of throwing the discus.

Statuette. Mounted horseman. Early fifth century B. C.

Kastor and Polydeukes, the patron divinities of horsemen in antiquity, were especially honored in the Peloponnesus, and this group of a rider and his horse from Mantineia, in Arkadia, may have been an offering at their shrine in that city. The relatively small proportions of the rider when compared with his steed are characteristic of archaic art. The bronze has been injured by fire.

Statuette. Warrior standing. Fifth century B.C.

From an inscription on the casque (Ἀσκληπιοῦ), it is inferred that this statuette was dedicated to Asklepios, the god of healing. The helmet, originally crowned by a high crest, is of Corinthian type, made in one piece, to be pulled down over the head when in use. A shield was carried on the left arm, where the rivet of attachment still remains, and some object, probably a spear, was held in the extended right hand. Interest in the portrayal of the nude male figure often induced Greek sculptors to resort to symbolism in the representation of dress. A warrior's equipment is here suggested by its more conspicuous parts.

Statuette. Athena. Fifth century B. C.

The dignity and repose distinguishing work of Pheidias and his school are clearly marked in this statuette of Athena, which belongs to the same epoch as the sculptures of the Parthenon. The head, which was turned slightly toward the left shoulder, and both arms are missing, and the surface of the bronze has been injured, apparently by heat. The goddess wears the Doric dress fastened on the shoulders, as usual, with clasp-pins, and over it the aegis,- a fleece edged with snakes and having the Gorgoneion, or mask of Medusa on the breast.

Second shelf, south end.

Temple key of bronze.

Homer tells how Penelope shot back the bolts which fastened the door of the store-room in the palace of

Odysseus with a "well-bent" key of bronze, which had an ivory handle; and vase paintings represent priestesses carrying in their hands as symbols of their office the bent bars which served as temple keys. (Compare the priestess with a key, on the shoulder of a water-jar in the Second Vase Room, on the ground floor, Case 17, bottom shelf, south end). This bronze key with an inscription (ΤΑΣ ΑΡΤΑΜΙΤΟΣ : ΤΑΣ ΕΝ ΛΟΥΣΟΙΣ, -τᾶς Ἀρτάμιτος, τᾶς ἐν Λουσοῖς) which shows that it belonged to the famous sanctuary of Artemis Hemera at Lousoi, among the mountains of Arkadia, is of characteristic shape, and is the best of the few extant examples of ancient Greek keys. The short haft, terminating in a snake's head, was originally covered with wood or ivory for convenient handling. In remote parts of Greece similar keys are still used for locks which resemble those of the antique type.

Top shelf, east side, left to right.

Statuette.

The youthful figure of Herakles, resting, wrapped in a cloak, standing with legs crossed, leaning on his club, dates from the beginning of the fifth century B. C. when Athenian vase painters of the severe red-figured style were representing men, old and young, in the same easy and characteristic posture. The statuette is intact, save for the loss of a small object once held in the right hand.

Lion and boar. Fifth century B. C.

Although Greek sculpture strove chiefly to perfect the representation of the human figure, it did not neglect to study animal forms. The lion stealthily attacking and the boar fiercely at bay are little masterpieces almost perfectly preserved. Remains of a slightly curved, horizontal band beneath the feet indicate that they once adorned the rim of a large, circular, bronze vessel, to which small figures were often attached as decoration, and that they are probably to be regarded as forming a group. The glaring eyes of the boar, the snarling upper lip and threatening tusks, the bristling ridge along its back, and the tense, muscular energy of the body, which recoils and at the same time is prepared to dash forward in self-defence, are no less admirable and true to nature than the cat-like glide, lean paunch and powerful hind legs of the lion. To the influence of artistic tradition is due the conventional type of the lion's head, with the mane arranged in a pattern of flame-like locks resembling those on the stone lion from Perachora, near Corinth, exhibited in the Archaic Room.

Statuette. Dancing Maenad. Etruscan. Early fifth century B. C.

Second shelf, east side, left to right.

Statuette. Female dancer. Etruscan. Archaic.

Statuette. Nude youth in the severe style of the early fifth century B. C., standing, with both hands extended in front of him. There was once a small object in the left hand, possibly a die.

Two mirror standards represent Aphrodite in a style still retaining elements of archaic convention. The smaller of the two shows the affected daintiness of Ionic art in the way in which the goddess lifts her skirt with the finger-tips of her left hand, and displays a flower, in her exaggerated elongated right hand. The taller figure stands on a low, folding stool, the crossed legs of which resemble those of a horse. Her Doric dress is simply and beautifully arranged, and the figure produces an impression of great dignity and grace. The ends of the curved bar for supporting the mirror-disc above the head of each figure terminate in Ionic volutes.

Statuette. Youth standing, Fifth century B.C.

Although not free from restrictions of archaic art, this figure produces a natural and lively effect by a slight modification of the stiff frontal pose maintained in sculpture through the sixth century B. C., and by revealing a clearer understanding of the structure of the human body, as well as a greater facility in modelling. Among the Greek cities of southern Italy, Croton, where this statuette is said to have been found, was famed for the prowess of its athletes, and it may be supposed that the artists of this region had every opportunity to study the athletic form, in repose and in action. Some object, probably a circular mirror-disc, was once attached to the crown of the head; the raised hand was ready to grasp the disc should it become unsteady as the bearer moved forward. The figure may be compared with the winged youth on the front of the marble relief at the east end of the room.

Statuette. Girl running, Etruscan. Early fifth century B. C.

The action of flight is well represented; the figure glides through the air with arms outspread, lightly touching the earth with one foot. She wears winged boots and a short sleeved, closely fitting shirt from under which the skirt of her high girt

dress falls barely to her knees.

Statuette.

The nude, bearded satyr pausing in the dance in an attitude of arrested motion, with his left hand negligently resting on his hip, his right raised above his head and his gaze directed toward the ground, reflects the ease and freedom of expression attained by Greek sculpture at the end of the fifth century B. C.

Statuette. Youth throwing the discus.
Fifth century B. C.

Second shelf, north end.

Gold earring. Nike (Victory) driving a biga (two-horse chariot). Fifth century B. C.

Extraordinary beauty of design, and delicacy and perfection of workmanship make this remarkable earring the finest extant specimen of Greek goldsmith's art. It is intact, save for the loss of colored enamel from the palmette on which the group is hung. Minute details, such as the earrings and bracelets of the Nike (Victory), the separate feathers on her wings, her hair and the manes and tails of the horses as well as their bridles and harness, are rendered with the greatest care. Even the wheels of the chariot turn on the axles. The spirited horses are rearing, and the garment of Nike is blown by the wind, yet the composition remains balanced and unified. It is like some splendid group of fifth century sculpture in miniature. Though the figures are hollow, the earring is still too large and heavy to have been worn with comfort by a living woman, and it is probable that it adorned the statue of some goddess, perhaps one of the gold and ivory statues of the fifth century B. C.

Bronze amphora (two-handled vase) and stand.
Fifth century B. C.
(In a separate case against the south wall).

The process either of casting or of hammering into shape so large a vessel as this bronze amphora, with walls of such uniform thinness, would have presented equally great technical difficulties. Hammer marks are visible on the inner surface of the stand and of the neck, and it is probable that the same means was employed for making the body of the vase. Decoration was restricted to the foot and rim, in order to bring into greater prominence the perfect outline of the body. The ornate handles, which were cast solid, resemble in general design those on the large Apulian amphora in the Fourth Century Room; each ends below in the heads of two swans, resting on the shoulder of the

vase.

Bronze louter (bath basin). Early fifth century B. C.
(In separate case against the south wall).

The pairs of wrestlers forming the two vertical handles on opposite sides of the rim, suggest that this basin was designed for the use of athletes in a palaestra (wrestling school) or in a gymnasium. Such basins were made of bronze, marble or terra-cotta, and were supported at a convenient height on a low pedestal, generally in the form of a small column. (Compare the interior decoration on a kylix, Case 2, centre of shelf 2, in this room). Both sets of handles were added chiefly as ornament; they were soldered, not riveted, in place and could not have served as a safe means of lifting the vessel when it contained water. Although the walls are so thin, the basin was probably cast, since the bronze shows no traces of hammer marks.

Greek terra-cotta figurines of the fifth century B. C.

Comparatively few terra-cotta figurines dating from the great period of Greek art, represented by the work of Pheidas and his contemporaries, have been found in Greece. It has been suggested that wide-spread popularity of Athenian red-figured vases as gifts in graves may have cut off one important source of demand for terra-cotta statuettes, thus causing a proportionate decrease in the number produced at this time. At Tarentum and on the sites of other Greek cities in Southern Italy and Sicily, however, very many votive figures of large size belonging to the fifth century B. C. have been discovered among the ruins of sanctuaries. Dionysos and Persephone are the types recurring most frequently. Most of the fifth century terra-cotta figurines in the collection of the Museum were offerings at shrines in Southern Italy. Some of these figures are among the finest extant examples in this field of art.

Case 6 (west wall)

Terra-cotta figurines of the fifth century B. C. from Greece and Southern Italy.

The six pieces on the top shelf, from Mesma in Southern Italy, are all made of the same orange-red clay flecked with mica. In the conspicuously successful rendering of individual traits the heads are comparable with works of sculpture, and several

of them are unusual, also among terra-cottas of the fifth century B. C. in being combined with a background decorated in low relief.

Top shelf, left to right.

Head of a partially bald man, with a long beard.

His left arm is bent up at the elbow, and with his right hand he touches the end of his beard.

Head of a bearded man, wearing a broad fillet.

Female head, wearing a broad fillet.

At her right is preserved part of the background with the head of a winged Eros who whispers in her ear.

Bearded head.

Long locks of hair fall thinly over the lined forehead.

Head of Artemis or of an Amazon, with long wavy hair.

Her raised right arm supported by a lance appears against the background, also the upper part of a quiver hanging from a branch of a tree.

Front of a nude bearded figure, playing the double flute.

Over his shoulders hang the ends of the broad fillet which is bound about his head.

Second shelf, left to right.

Fragment of a statuette. From Taremtum.

Dionysos was worshipped at Tarentum as a guardian of the dead, and many statuettes have been discovered there on the site of his sanctuary representing the god as a youth, or, as in this instance, bearded. The ornate character of the heavy crown, with broad looped fillets falling to the shoulders and with a large rosette or open flower at each side of the head, accentuate the quiet and benign expression of the face, which reflects the influence of fifth century sculpture. (Compare the colossal head of Zeus in the First Marble Room).

Female head. From Tarentum.

This head has been identified as Persephone(Kore) whose cult was associated with that of the Chthonian Dionysos at Tarentum. The arrangement of the hair, the form of the eyes, the full lips and the rounded chin are typical of works of art produced under the influence of Pheidias and his school. In beauty, freshness and vigor this head surpasses all the other numerous representations of Persephone discovered at Tarentum.

Head of a youth. From Tarentum.

The ideal of beauty evolved in Tarentine art by the end of the fifth century B. C., while not reaching the full perfection of Attic refinement which exerted a dominant influence upon it, possessed a strength and greatness which are clearly reflected in this head of a youth. He wears a stephane or diadem from under which his hair falls in locks over his ears. The iris and pupil of the eyes and a slight beard on the cheeks are indicated.

Head of a goddess. From Tarentum.

Probably Persephone. Most of the headcovering (sakkos) has been broken away. This head possesses the directness and dignity which characterize the best Tarentine terra-cottas of the fifth century B. C.

Head of a goddess. From Sybaris(?)

The conventional arrangement of the hair in tight snail-shell curls indicates a date in the first half of the fifth century B. C.

Third shelf, left to right.

Youthful head. From Lokri.

A cap is visible under the Corinthian helmet, which is pushed back upon the head to leave the face exposed. The work is delicate and fine.

Statuette. Attic.

A goddess, probably Hera, dressed in a long Doric chiton, wearing on her head a stephane (diadem) and over it a veil. In the pose and in the treatment of the drapery this figure resembles Attic sculpture of the middle of the fifth century B. C.

Female head. Attic.

The hair is bound in a great mass by three bands.

The modelling is careful and detailed.

Head of a girl. Attic.

The hair is confined in a sakkos or cap. Fine Attic work.

Statuette. Attic.

Nude, standing youth with short hair bound by a fillet.

Mask of Persephone (Kore). From Licata, Sicily.

Her long wavy hair is parted in the middle; she wears a high stephane (diadem), a veil and round earrings.

Bottom shelf, left to right.

Head and shoulders of a horse. From Tarentum.

Fragment of a group in relief representing Kastor and Polydeukes, who were worshipped at Tarentum. A larger and more complete relief representing a similar subject is shown in the Terra-Cotta Room, on the ground floor, Case 5, top shelf, left. (Compare the mounted warrior on the marble grave relief exhibited on the west wall in this room).

Statuette. From Southern Italy.

A bearded Satyr standing on one leg, shading his eyes with his right hand to look away.

Fragment of a statuette. From Tarentum.

A youth wrapped in a cloak stands with his head raised, looking alertly toward the right. The figure is preserved down to the waist. The style is of the late fifth century B. C.

Statuette. Attic.

A caricature representing a seated woman with a baby in her lap. The baby holds out a ball at arm's length.

Statuette. Attic.

Leda clasps the swan which has flown to her for protection and raises her cloak as a shield against the attack of the eagle. (Compare the group in the First Marble Room).

Votive mask of Demeter. Attic.
(In a separate case on the north wall).

She wears a high crown (polos), a Doric chiton and a himation. In her left hand is a flower-bud, in her right a seed. The half figure is perhaps intended to suggest the revival of vegetation in the spring, and the rising of the power of the goddess from the depths of the earth.

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